

Photo Omitted

After several uncommonly mild winters, snow and subzero cold returned to North Dakota in abundance, reminding us where we live.

Among our aquatic species, winter's influence was less apparent, but fish in many North Dakota waters will be affected. Winterkill in a lake does not generally result from scarcity of food or from exposure to the elements as it does with pheasants. Instead, it occurs when dissolved oxygen in the water falls below levels fish need to survive. The more snow on the ice, the less sunlight that reaches aquatic plants. Plants convert sunlight into food and give off oxygen as a byproduct of photosynthesis. Without it, fish die.

But fish die every winter – as do pheasants and deer – on the Northern Plains. This is nothing new. The good thing is that all the waters and all the fish don't succumb to the hazards of a long winter. What remains is some pretty good fishing for a variety of species swimming in a variety of waters.

Wet a line this year and see.

The state is divided into three fisheries districts – western, central and eastern – for management purposes by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. What follows are brief reports on fishing prospects for those districts.

Western Fisheries District

Southwest North Dakota has been in the midst of a dry cycle for three years, said Emil Berard, Department western district fisheries supervisor in Dickinson. "It looks as if the lakes and the fish came through in tough shape this year because of the long winter and heavy snow cover," he said.

Water levels in the northwest are generally satisfactory, although a few lakes dropped several feet by late fall, according to Fred Ryckman, Department district fisheries biologist in Williston. "Winter was nothing less than brutal," he said.

2004 FISHING OUTLOOK

By Pat Headrick

Fish kills are expected in several waters in the northwest, but the extent and severity is not known. "We won't know the exact magnitude of this problem until we can complete population sampling at affected waters after ice out," Ryckman said. A positive, he points out, is that more than enough runoff from snowmelt should eliminate low water concerns in some northwestern waters.

Central Fisheries District

The effects of winter will be felt in the central part of the state, said Jeff Hendrickson, Department district fisheries supervisor in Riverdale. He is, however, optimistic about walleye, smallmouth bass, and pike fishing prospects for Lake Sakakawea.

Water conditions in the central to north-central parts of the state remain good, said Dave Fryda, Department district fisheries biologist in Riverdale. In the south-central, however, water conditions have deteriorated considerably, although fish populations have not yet declined. The extent of winterkill won't be known until ice out, he said.

Eastern Fisheries District

Many northeastern lakes should receive runoff from snowmelt, although there is potential for winterkill in some waters, said Randy Hiltner, Department district fisheries biologist in Devils Lake.

"Devils Lake is down about two feet from its peak two years ago," he said. "Good snow-pack in the Devils Lake Basin should raise lake levels somewhat."

Gene Van Eeckhout, Department district fisheries biologist in Jamestown, reported good amounts of snow east of Highway 1. "South and west of Jamestown in the Ashley-Wishek country," he said, "there is a lot less snow. North of the interstate, we've got enough snow to put some water back in the lakes and the farther east you go it gets better in terms of less water loss."

Anglers with underwater cameras reported seeing dead fish in winter on the bottom of some lakes, Van Eeckhout said. "We've tried to get out and check on some of these waters when conditions permit," he said.

Anglers also reported seeing live minnows coming up in the holes they drilled, as the fish were evidently hanging in that last little layer of oxygen right below the ice, Van Eeckhout said. "The extent of winterkill, however, is still too early to gauge," he said.

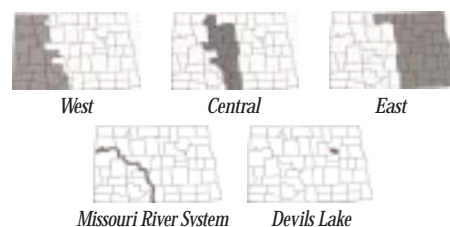
Prospects for 2004

The following information from Department fisheries biologists indicates waters that likely hold promise for anglers. Lakes in the following sections are listed in order by county, with multi-county waters, such as rivers and larger lakes, listed at the end of each section.

To learn more about these waters, including such details as directions from the nearest town, fish species available, and facilities such as boat ramps, see the 2004 North Dakota Fishing Waters Guide that also appears in this issue. Fishing waters are also listed in the 2004-06 North Dakota fishing regulations guide.

Anglers are reminded to thoroughly review the fishing guide for information pertaining to lakes and rivers they plan to fish.

NORTHERN PIKE



WEST

The outlook for pike fishing in southwestern North Dakota is not the best, according to Berard. Several dry years, with major winterkill in 2000-01, affected many southwestern lakes. Recent mild winters resulted in low water levels, reducing survival of stocked pike and increased the potential for winterkill in 2003-04.

For northwestern North Dakota, district lakes should provide some good pike fishing, Ryckman said.

Berard and Ryckman noted conditions for pike in the following lakes:

Blacktail Dam (Williams County) – Holds a strong population of pike with a variety of sizes to more than 20 pounds.

Bowman-Haley (Bowman County) – A fair spring fishery for smaller pike, but very dependent on water levels.

Cedar Lake (Slope County) – Suffered partial winterkill in 2000-01, but still produces some pike angling for larger fish.

Danzig Dam (Morton County) – Good numbers of pike with some over 15 pounds.

Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida) (Grant County) – Continues to have a limited fishery for pike up to 15 pounds.

Patterson Lake (Stark County) – Fair for spring pike of 4-8 pounds.

Powers Lake (Burke County) – Good numbers of northern pike with many 5-8 pound fish, and some going well over 10 pounds. Fishing pressure and harvest are relatively light. A partial fish kill is expected.

Photo Omitted

Smishek Lake (Burke County) – Fair numbers of pike, a few weighing more than 20 pounds.

Spring Lake (Bowman County) – Good numbers of small pike.

Cannonball, Heart, and Grand rivers and Cedar Creek – Good spring fisheries for pike, especially downstream from low-head diversion structures.

CENTRAL

While pike populations district-wide are generally diminishing due to declining water levels, many quality fisheries remain, Fryda said.

Fryda and Hendrickson suggest the following waters as likely northern pike fishing spots in central North Dakota:

Brush Lake (McLean County) – Good numbers of pike, a few exceeding 5 pounds.

Buffalo Lodge Lake (McHenry County) – Good numbers of pike up to 5 pounds.

Camp Lake (McLean County) – Abundant pike.

Coal Mine Lake (Sheridan County) – Decent pike population with some fish up to 15 pounds.

Cottonwood Lake (McHenry County) – Good numbers of fish from 4-6 pounds.

Crooked Lake (McLean County) – Good numbers of pike with many over 5 pounds.

Lake Darling (Renville County) – Low numbers of pike, but those available are large.

Long Lake (McLean County) – Abundant small pike.

Mitchell Lake (Burleigh County) – High population of small pike.

North Carlson Lake (Ward County) – Decent numbers of pike up to 5 pounds.

Rice Lake (Emmons County) – Good numbers of keeper pike, but winterkill is a concern.

Rice Lake (Ward County) – Decent pike numbers, but fish exceeding 5 pounds are not common.

Strawberry Lake (McLean County) – Abundant pike with many fish exceeding 5 pounds.

EAST

Lakes in the eastern part of the state will continue to provide good northern pike fishing, Hiltner and Van Eeckhout said.

"In the northeast, if winterkill was not widespread, many of the lakes should receive some runoff and continue to provide opportunities to catch lots of pike," Hiltner said. Van Eeckhout shares the same opinion for pike fishing on southeastern lakes.

Van Eeckhout and Hiltner suggest anglers try these waters for pike this year:

Armourdale Dam (Towner County) – Good for small to average pike.

Buffalo Lake (Sargent County) – Should continue providing good pike fishing.

Bylin Dam (Walsh County) – Good pike numbers with most fish less than 5 pounds.

Barnes Lake (Stutsman County) – Should provide good pike fishing.

Carpenter Lake (Rolette County) – An excellent pike fishery.

Cherry Lake (Kidder County) – Excellent pike fishing last winter. Fish are not large, but fairly abundant.

Coldwater Lake (McIntosh County) – Good to excellent pike fishing last summer and winter. Lots of pike.

Dry Lake (McIntosh County) – Pike are not as abundant as in previous years, but an excellent population still exists.

Golden Lakes, North and South (Steele County) – Good pike fishing should continue. Anglers may not take northern pike less than 24 inches.

Island Lake (Rolette County) – Excellent pike fishery with some bigger fish.

Kalmbach Lake (LaMoure County) – Pike fishing has slowed, but the lake is still a good choice for early-season fishing.

Larimore Dam (Grand Forks County) – Nice average-sized pike.

Lake Laretta (Nelson County) – Has an excellent pike population with many fish of more than 5 pounds.

Mallard Marsh (Stutsman County) – The lake is receding, but should provide good pike fishing.

Matejcek Dam (Walsh County) – Good for some big pike.

Lake Metigoshe (Bottineau County) – Good northern pike fishing.

Red Willow Lake (Griggs County) – Continues to provide good pike fishing. Anglers may not take northern pike less than 24 inches.

School Section Lake (Rolette County) – An excellent pike fishery.

Sibley Lake (Griggs County) – Lots of pike over 5 pounds. Poor summer access.

Silver Lake (Benson County) – Continues to produce nice northern pike. Anglers are reminded to check with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for specific dates the lake is open to fishing.

Sweetwater Lake/Morrison Lake (Ramsey County) – Anglers took lots of nice northern pike through the ice.

Tewaukon Lake (Sargent County) – Located on Tewaukon National Wildlife Refuge. The lake should continue to provide good pike fishing. Anglers may not take northern pike less than 24 inches.

Tolna Dam (Nelson County) – Good numbers of average-sized pike.

West Lake (Logan County) – Big water that holds good numbers of fish. High harvest last summer and during winter may have reduced the population.

MISSOURI RIVER SYSTEM

Most of the Missouri River System has good pike populations and there is the potential for anglers to catch large fish. Pike from the banner 1994 year-class get larger every year, Hendrickson said, and a lot of them should be in the 15-plus pound range in 2004.

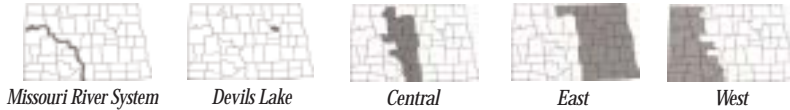
In northwestern North Dakota, Sakakawea's low level has greatly reduced opportunities for pike, according to Ryckman. "Much of Sakakawea's headwaters area, the lower portion of the Little Muddy River and other backwaters in the Williston area, have all but dried up," he said. "Best reports from pike anglers are now from areas much farther downstream in Sakakawea."

DEVILS LAKE

Devils Lake water levels have remained relatively high, with the lake still in excess of 100,000 surface acres. Pike habitat is still good, especially in the upper regions of the lake, Hiltner said.

"As has been the case since the mid-1990s, there will be great pike fishing opportunities," Hiltner predicted for 2004. Boat anglers can expect good results when casting crankbaits and similar lures. Excellent pike fishing can also be had from shore in late April through June by fishing with lures and smelt off the riprap on Highway 19 and 281, as well as other roadways and the city dike. Pike are also often caught incidentally by anglers fishing for walleye or white bass with live bait.

WALLEYE



MISSOURI RIVER SYSTEM

The Missouri River System continues to support good walleye populations, Hendrickson said. Lake Sakakawea holds most sizes of walleye, with many fish from 4-8 pounds. This summer, anglers should see lots of fish from the 2000-01 year-classes. Fishing has been good for walleye the last few years and that should continue in 2004.

On the upper end of Sakakawea, anglers can look for walleye and sauger fishing to be good, provided water levels stay high enough to allow for angler access, Ryckman said.

South of Garrison Dam, the Missouri River's spring walleye run is expected to be similar to last year's run, with plenty of 15-20-inch fish, Hendrickson predicts.

Farther south on Lake Oahe, most fish caught will likely be small, in the 15-20-inch range. A rainbow smelt shortage continues and walleye growth, as a result of this forage scarcity, is slow in the Missouri River and Lake Oahe.

DEVILS LAKE

Devils Lake continues to support a good walleye population, with many small- to mid-size fish. "Strong year-classes are coming up, with most fish less than 20 inches in length, however, recent netting surveys show the average size continues to increase," Hiltner said.

Walleye continue to experience significant natural reproduction, which should sustain

walleye fishing opportunities into the future, Hiltner said. "Devils Lake is a main destination for walleye anglers as the lake received heavy fishing pressure last spring and summer," he said.

CENTRAL

Traditional central district walleye fisheries such as Lake Audubon and the Garrison Diversion Unit lakes will continue to provide good walleye fishing. In addition, many smaller, less popular lakes contain quality walleye populations, Fryda said.

Lake Audubon (McLean County) – Good numbers of quality-size fish. "The size and condition of the walleye population has improved to the best level ever documented," Fryda said. A couple strong, recent year-classes means anglers will likely catch many fish below harvestable size, despite abundant larger fish.

Lake Brekken (McLean County) – Adjacent to, but not part of the McClusky Canal chain of lakes. Lots of small walleye will provide high catch rates. Anglers are encouraged to harvest some of these abundant, smaller walleye.

Lake Darling (Renville County) – Low numbers of larger walleye with many small fish. Anglers are encouraged to be conservative in harvest of young walleye.

Froelich Dam (Sioux County) – A good walleye population with quality-sized fish including some over 20 inches.

Heckers Lake (McLean County) – This Garrison Diversion Unit fishery has a good walleye population comprised of multiple age classes including some large fish.

Holmes Lake (McLean County) – Adjacent to, but not part of the McClusky Canal chain of lakes. Lots of small walleye will provide high catch rates. Anglers are encouraged to harvest some of these abundant, smaller walleye.

New Johns Lake (Burleigh County) – This Garrison Diversion Unit fishery has a good walleye population comprised of multiple age classes including some large fish.

East and West Park lakes (McLean County) – These Garrison Diversion Unit fisheries have good walleye populations comprised of multiple age classes including some large fish.

South Hoffer (Sheridan County) – Fair number of walleye with some nice fish available.

Sweet Briar Dam (Morton County) – Fair walleye population with good size structure.

Photo Omitted

EAST

Eastern North Dakota's small lakes and reservoirs hold fair to good walleye populations. "Water conditions should be good in the northeast as winter produced a good snow pack," Hiltner said. Because most of these waters are stocked regularly, catch-and-release fishing is encouraged to help maintain a quality, long-term fishery.

"Walleye populations in the southeast seem to be holding up to the pressure because of good water conditions and excellent forage," said Van Eeckhout.

Walleye fishing prospects in the east include:

Lake Ashtabula (Barnes County) – Walleye are less abundant than in previous years. Walleye angling will be difficult.

Jamestown Reservoir (Stutsman County) – Lots of small walleye in the system. A 14-inch minimum size limit applies for the next two fishing seasons.

McVille Dam (Nelson County) – A small reservoir with some nice-sized walleye.

Lake Metigoshe (Bottineau County) – Some nice walleye available.

Pipestem Reservoir – Not always the best walleye fishery, but the potential is there every year.

Tobiason Lake (Steele County) – A good population of nice walleye.

WEST

Walleye are doing well in larger, deeper waters such as Lake Tschida (Heart Butte), Patterson Lake and Bowman-Haley Dam. Smaller lakes also provide some walleye fishing. Anglers are encouraged to catch-and-release walleye in smaller lakes because they can be fished out so easily.

Western lakes to consider for walleye:

Indian Creek Dam (Hettinger County) – An excellent walleye lake with a mixture of age and size classes.

Northgate Dam (Burke County) – Contains good numbers of walleye with several age classes well over 20 inches.

Patterson Lake (Stark County) – A young, but reliable fishery.

Smishek Lake – Contains fair numbers of fish with some walleye exceeding 6 pounds.

CATFISH



Best catfishing in North Dakota is mainly found in the Red River, Heart River, and Missouri River System. These following waters sometimes can provide exciting catfishing:

EAST

Red River – Catfishing is excellent over the length of the river. The catfish population is stable in the northern reaches, (the Red flows south to north) and the southern stretch holds more, but smaller fish. The area from Drayton to Pembina produces lots of trophy fish. Red River (and Bois de Sioux) anglers may take daily no more than one channel catfish greater than 24 inches in length.

Sheyenne River – Excellent at times below the dams at Lisbon and Fort Ransom.

MISSOURI RIVER SYSTEM

Missouri River (Garrison Tailrace) – Provides some good fishing for smaller catfish, especially in the summer months. Mouths of tributaries may produce some bigger fish.

Lake Oahe – In the most recent netting survey, catfish were the most abundant fish species in Oahe, most averaging about 2 pounds.

Lake Sakakawea – Good numbers of cats throughout the reservoir, but best numbers and fishing success in the upper end.

Upper Lake Sakakawea, Missouri River (above the reservoir) **and Yellowstone River** – Ryckman reports a strong catfish population, with some fish exceeding 10 pounds. This is where anglers will find the best chance to catch a big cat in the Missouri River System. Anglers who target the area from Williston to Missouri-Yellowstone confluence are generally quite successful during open water, and fair numbers of catfish are caught through the ice as well. The catfish population within this reach is an underutilized resource, Ryckman said.

WEST

Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida) (Grant County) – A fairly good fishery with many whopper catfish. This fishery extends up the Heart River to Patterson Lake, said Berard.

Little Missouri River – Experienced major summerkill in 2002, but good catfishing can be had on the river upstream to Medora. Success continues even farther upstream when river flows are high.

Photo Omitted

PANFISH *(Yellow Perch, Crappie, Bluegill)*



East



West



Central



Devils Lake

Although walleye and northern pike capture the lion's share of angler attention across the state during spring and summer, panfish are an overlooked resource in many waters.

Daily and possession limits have been changed statewide for perch, crappie, and bluegill. The daily limit is now 35 and possession limit is 175.

EAST

The region's many smaller lakes provide some excellent panfishing. Yellow perch, bluegill and crappie are among the more popular panfish. Some waters, such as Devils Lake, produce large perch from year to year. Other "new" lakes, many of them just big sloughs created by overflow from other waters, have strong perch populations and are providing lots of angling opportunities.

Good bluegill and crappie lakes are rarer than perch lakes. Some waters may have lots of small bluegill and crappies, but few have numerous big fish.

Hiltner and Van Eeckhout suggest anglers consider the following waters for panfish:

Armourdale Dam (Towner County) – Several size classes of perch with improving average size.

Lake Ashtabula (Barnes County) – Perch fishing will not be good at Ashtabula for a few years because fish numbers are extremely low.

Bisbee Dam (Big Coulee) (Towner County) – A perennial perch fishery.

Brewer Lake (Cass County) – Bluegill are slowly recovering from a fish kill during spring 2002. Good angling may be a year or so away.

Coldwater Lake (McIntosh County) – Lots of small perch.

Dead Colt Creek (Ransom County) – Some excellent crappie and bluegill fishing at times, depending on the year.

Dion Lake (Rolette County) – Can provide good perch action.

Dry Lake (McIntosh County) – Perch fishing has dropped off substantially because of increased numbers of walleye.

Goose Lake (Wells County) – Some nice perch and crappie.

Homme Dam (Walsh County) – Contains a decent crappie population with some nice fish.

Jamestown Reservoir (Stutsman County) – Second-best crappie fishery in the southeast. Fair for crappies over the winter. Population appears to be lower than last year.

Lake LaMoure (LaMoure County) – Crappie are not as abundant as in past years, but size structure is excellent.

Long Lake (Bottineau County) – Good population of medium-size perch.

Matejcek Dam (Walsh County) – This water supports a decent crappie and perch population.

Lake Metigoshe (Bottineau County) – Holds several sizes of bluegill – some are "slabs" – along with some nice crappies.

Photo Omitted

McVile Dam (Nelson County) – Lots of small perch.

Pipestem Reservoir (Stutsman County) – Probably the best crappie fishery in the southeast. Excellent crappie fishing the last two summers and winters.

Red Willow Lake (Griggs County) – This small lake has some good-size bluegill.

South Golden Lake (Steele County) – Good numbers of perch with some bigger fish.

Stump Lake (Nelson County) – Holds some big perch, but population densities are much lower than they were several years ago.

WEST

Berard and Ryckman list the following waters as good prospects for panfish in western North Dakota:

Blacktail Dam (Williams County) – Fair numbers of perch and bluegill. Mostly smaller fish, although some 1-pound-plus fish of each species.

Bowman-Haley Reservoir (Bowman County) – A limited fishery for large bluegill and yellow perch.

Camel Hump Dam (Golden Valley County) – Nice-sized bluegill with good overall population, although they are mixed and hybridized with green sunfish.

Danzig Dam (Morton County) – Limited numbers of larger perch and bluegill.

Davis Dam (Slope County) – Many small bluegill, but good overall population.

Epping-Springbrook Dam (Williams County) – Fair numbers of perch with some quality-size and larger fish.

Fish Creek Dam (Morton County) – Good population of quality-size crappie. Some larger perch are showing up in the winter fishery.

Heart Butte Dam (Lake Tschida) (Grant County) – Improved fishery for quality-size perch, crappie, and white bass.

Indian Creek (Hettinger County) – Good numbers of larger bluegill. Some larger perch also showing up in the winter fishery.

Leland Dam (McKenzie County) – Supports a good bluegill population, although most fish are smaller.

McGregor Dam (Williams County) – Good numbers of mostly small perch, but still provides a lot of fishing activity.

Northgate Dam (Burke County) – Strong bluegill population with many exceeding 1 pound. Catch-and-release of larger fish is strongly encouraged. The crappie population has also expanded in recent years, and anglers reported good success at times in 2003.

Nygren Dam (Morton County) – Fair to good population of bluegill with some nice-sized fish.

Odland Dam (Golden Valley County) – Good numbers of large bluegill and yellow perch.

Patterson Lake (Stark County) – A limited, though improving, fishery for quality-size crappie. Some nice bluegill and perch also caught in the winter.

Raleigh Reservoir (Grant County) – Excellent bluegill population with many fish more than a half-pound. Some larger perch also showing up in the winter.

Sather Dam (McKenzie County) – Supports a good bluegill population, although most are smaller fish.

Sheep Creek Dam (Grant County) – Excellent bluegill population with fish averaging a quarter-pound.

Smishek Lake – Bluegill population has expanded in recent years. Anglers reported good success in 2003 with at least some fish over 1 pound.

Trenton Lake (Williams County) – This Missouri River backwater contains good numbers of crappies, but most are less than 9 inches.

CENTRAL

In the central district, some of the better panfish waters include:

McDowell Dam (Burleigh County) – Although the abundance of large bluegill declined the last couple years, several recent year-classes should begin providing good fishing for small- to medium-sized fish.

Arroda Lakes (Oliver County) – Fair crappie abundance with some quality fish available.

Lake Audubon (McLean County) – Perch numbers continue to improve, but the population is mostly fair-sized fish. Perch size should improve as recent year-classes mature. Good catches have been reported during early ice periods the last two winters.

Coal Mine Lake (Sheridan County) – Low numbers of quality-size perch.

Crooked Lake (McLean County) – Strong perch population with various sizes available to anglers.

Lake Darling (Renville County) – Perch numbers down, but some nice-sized fish are available.

Heckers Lake (McLean County) – Lots of small- to medium-sized yellow perch. Bluegill and crappie numbers have increased throughout the McClusky Canal chain with some quality-size fish available.

Holmes Lake (McLean County) – Fair population of nice bluegill. If you can find them, many are over 1 pound.

Nelson Lake (Oliver County) – Abundant bluegill and crappie.

New Johns Lake (Burleigh County) – Lots of small- to medium-sized yellow perch. Bluegill and crappie numbers have increased throughout the McClusky Canal chain, with some quality-size fish available.

East and West Park lakes (McLean County) – Lots of small- to medium-sized yellow perch. Bluegill and crappie numbers have increased throughout the McClusky Canal chain, with some quality-size fish available.

Rice Lake (Emmons County) – Fair numbers of large perch. However, there is a good chance of winterkill.

Round Lake (McHenry County) – Good numbers of small perch. Fishing should improve over the next several years as recent year-classes mature.

Strawberry Lake (McLean County) – Lots of small perch.

Sweet Briar Dam (Morton County) – Good population of quality-sized bluegill. Fair abundance of small-sized perch.

Crown Butte (Morton County) – Good population of quality bluegill. Winter fishing for large bluegill was excellent.

DEVILS LAKE

Perch densities in Devils Lake are higher than during the early to mid-1990s. The population structure contains a good mix of sizes with most fish in the 9-10-inch range, and some jumbos as well. The perch fishing was good last December, but tapered off as heavy snow and cold weather set in for an extended period. With the last good perch hatch in 2001, the perch population looks to be in decent shape for the near future, however, a strong hatch would be welcome this spring, Hiltner said.

SALMON



Missouri River System

MISSOURI RIVER SYSTEM

Current water levels have affected the salmon fishery in Lake Sakakawea. During the current drought, coldwater habitat and smelt abundance have been reduced. Because of this, salmon abundance and growth will be reduced in 2004. However, there should be salmon available for anglers and stocking will continue as long as eggs are available.

WHITE BASS



West



Devils Lake



Missouri River System

For anglers who appreciate the explosiveness of white bass, North Dakota offers some limited opportunities. Though not common, when an angler does locate a school, these exciting fish can provide plenty of fast and furious action. White bass can be found in these waters:

WEST

Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida) (Grant County) – White bass population is expanding slowly, but those caught are quality fish.

DEVILS LAKE

The state record white bass – 4 pounds, 8 ounces – was taken at Devils Lake. The lake holds good numbers of 2-pound-plus fish that are more appreciated each year for sporting and eating quality. Best times to catch them are late May and early June, although good fishing is possible anytime there is open water.

MISSOURI RIVER SYSTEM

Lakes Sakakawea and Oahe hold good numbers of fish up to 15 inches, although Oahe has more white bass.

BASS (*Largemouth, Smallmouth*)



Central



West



East



Missouri River System

For North Dakota anglers who enjoy fishing for largemouth or smallmouth bass, there are many opportunities throughout the state.

The Department strongly encourages catch-and-release fishing for bass, except in lakes where small fish may be overabundant. The following waters are recommended for largemouth and smallmouth by the fisheries biologists who manage them:

CENTRAL

Lake Audubon (McLean County) – A good population of smallmouth bass with some large fish.

Crown Butte Dam (Morton County) – Abundant young largemouth bass.

Heckers Lake (McLean County) – Excellent smallmouth bass fishery with an abundance of fish up to 18 inches. Largemouth bass in lower numbers, but many are in the 3-4-pound category.

McDowell Dam (Burleigh County) – Good numbers of nice-sized largemouth bass.

Nelson Lake (Oliver County) – Hands down the best largemouth bass lake in the state. Open water year-round allows fish to grow better than in other lakes. The current state record fish – 8 pounds, 7 1/2 ounces – was taken here in 1983.

New Johns Lake (Burleigh County) – Excellent smallmouth bass fishery with an abundance of fish up to 18 inches. Largemouth bass in lower numbers, but many are in the 3-4 pound category.

East and West Park lakes (McLean County) – Excellent smallmouth bass fishery with an abundance of fish up to 18 inches. Largemouth bass in lower numbers, but many are in the 3-4 pound category.

Riverdale Spillway Pond (McLean County) – Decent smallmouth bass fishery with some large fish.

Sweet Briar Dam (Morton County) – A very good population of quality-sized largemouth bass.

WEST

Baukol-Noonan Wildlife Management Area waters (Divide County) – Good numbers of largemouth, although most are smaller.

Belfield Dam (Stark County) – A fair largemouth population, but fish generally are less than one pound. Catch-and-release is encouraged.

Blacktail Dam (Williams County) – Contains an expanding population of smallmouth bass.

Davis Dam (Slope County) – A fair largemouth population with a few fish up to 4 pounds. Catch-and-release is encouraged.

Camel Hump Dam (Golden Valley County) – A good population of largemouth bass with some 5-pound fish.

Fish Creek Dam (Morton County) – Should be good for largemouth and smallmouth bass.

Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida) (Grant County) – Although smallmouth bass are not common, they are usually large. The tailrace below the dam occasionally attracts good numbers of smallmouth.

Indian Creek Dam (Hettinger County) – Low density smallmouth population, but some nice fish. The lake also has fair numbers of largemouth bass.

Kota-Ray Dam (Williams County) – Contains good populations of both largemouth and smallmouth bass with some larger fish of both species.

Leland Dam (McKenzie County) – Holds a good largemouth bass population, although most are smaller fish.

McGregor Dam (Williams County) – Contains a fair number of smallmouth bass, but most are small. Catch-and-release is encouraged.

Northgate Dam (Burke County) – Good numbers of smallmouth bass, although most fish are smaller. A few largemouth bass also present, but the population is down considerably compared to several years ago.

Photo Omitted

Nygren Dam (Morton County) – Holds a good population of largemouth bass with some fish up to 4 pounds.

Raleigh Reservoir (Grant County) – Boasts a good largemouth bass population with plenty of whoppers. A limited number of smaller-size smallmouth bass available.

Sheep Creek Dam (Grant County) – A fair, young population of largemouth and smallmouth bass. The lake suffered a partial kill in 2001.

Sather Dam (McKenzie County) – Holds a good largemouth bass population, although most fish are smaller.

EAST

Brewer Lake (Cass County) – Largemouth and smallmouth bass populations are fair to good in size and abundance. Catch-and-release of larger fish is encouraged.

Dead Colt Creek (Ransom County) – The lake has an excellent largemouth bass population. Catch-and-release of larger fish is encouraged.

Homme Dam (Walsh County) – Decent largemouth bass fishery with some big fish.

Larimore Dam (Grand Forks County) – Holds several sizes of largemouth bass. Catch-and-release is recommended.

Long Lake (Bottineau County) – Some largemouth bass in the 3-pound class.

McVile Dam (Nelson County) – A small reservoir with some nice bass.

Spiritwood Lake (Stutsman County) – A strong population of smallmouth bass. Many whopper-sized fish, and the new state record smallmouth was taken there last fall.

Sheyenne River (stretch between Fort Ransom and Lisbon) (Ransom County) – A relatively unused fishery. Provides good habitat for smallmouth bass.

MISSOURI RIVER SYSTEM

Lake Sakakawea has a very good smallmouth population with many large fish taken in recent years, Hendrickson said. Many of those fish, he said, were in the 3-pound-plus range. Excellent reproduction the last decade gives Lake Sakakawea's smallmouth fishery a bright future.

TROUT



West



East



Central



Missouri River System

Game and Fish stocks trout in many waters throughout the state. Trout are fast-growing, hard-fighting, and in many cases can provide an instant fishery for anglers. Trout found in the state include rainbow, brown and cutthroat. Trout do not reproduce naturally in North Dakota.

Best trout fishing waters are described by those fisheries biologists who manage them:

WEST

Belfield Dam (Billings County) – Limited population of smaller rainbow trout because of drought conditions and construction.

Northgate Dam (Burke County) – Good rainbow trout population, but there are fewer large fish compared to past years.

Baukol-Noonan Wildlife Management Area waters (Divide County) – All three waters on this WMA contain fair populations of rainbow trout. These waters are considered to be lightly fished and could support more angling.

Camel Hump Dam (Golden Valley County) – Rainbow and brown trout prospects are limited because of drought conditions and construction.

Davis Dam (Slope County) – Trout fishing should be fair this year.

Fish Creek Dam (Morton County) – Limited brown and rainbow trout population because of drought conditions and construction.

Kettle Lake (Williams County) – Fair numbers of rainbows with some larger fish. This lake is closed to winter fishing. Catch-and-release is encouraged.

Kota-Ray Dam (Williams County) – Good numbers of trout, but mostly smaller fish. Relatively high angler use and harvest. Catch-and-release is encouraged.

North Lemmon Lake (Adams County) – Very good rainbow trout lake with a few nice browns. Angling can be difficult because of drought conditions and construction.

Nygren Dam (Morton County) – Remains fair for trout.

Raleigh Reservoir (Grant County) – One of the better trout lakes in western North Dakota. Rainbows up to six pounds and a limited number of smaller browns.

Sather Dam (McKenzie County) – Contains a fair trout population, although most are less than 14 inches.

Sheep Creek Dam (Grant County) – Fair for smaller rainbow trout. Angling can be difficult because of drought conditions and construction.

EAST

Strawberry Lake (Bottineau County) – This put-and-take trout lake produces keeper fish by mid-summer.

Turtle River (Grand Forks County) – Game and Fish continues stocking catchable trout in spring and fall in Turtle River State Park. These fish provide a stream fishery in an area close to a large population center.

Blumhardt Lake (McIntosh County) – Stocked annually with rainbows.

Hooker Lake (Rolette County) – A good rainbow population with catchable-size fish.

Mooreton Pond (Richland County) – Catchable-size trout are annually stocked to supply the demand in this high-use area.

CENTRAL

Crown Butte Dam (Morton County) – Strictly a put-and-take trout fishery with no over-summer survival.

Custer Mine Pond (McLean County) – A good put-and-take fishery in a small, easy-to-fish pond.

Lightning Lake (McLean County) – A recently renovated fishery that will likely have some carry-over of adult trout.

Velva Sportsmen's Pond (Ward County) – Consistently a quality fishery for nice-size browns and rainbows.

McDowell Dam (Burleigh County) – Frequent summer kills limit carry-over. This lake is primarily a put-and-take fishery. Provides a good trout fishery close to an urban area during early spring before water temperatures increase.

MISSOURI RIVER SYSTEM

Lake trout were stocked in Sakakawea from 1997-99 and anglers have been catching them recently. Last summer, lake trout were reported to be 5-6 pounds. Anglers are encouraged to release lakereels until the population becomes established.

The quality trout fishery from Garrison Dam Tailrace and downstream continues to produce many large trout each year. Cutthroat trout were introduced in 1999 and 2001 with very good results. Brown and cutthroat trout are stocked in alternating years in the Tailrace, and every year large fish are taken.

***PAT HEADRICK** is the Game and Fish Department's website editor.*